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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE ENGLISH/BELL, WHA/CCA

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TAGS: PREL HR CU

SUBJECT: (C) EMBASSY ZAGREB FORESTALLS MESIC VISIT TO CUBA

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph Frank for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Presidential advisor Budimir Loncar raised with the Ambassador March 14 the possibility of an April visit by President Mesic to Cuba. Croatian companies apparently hope to get new contracts servicing and replacing technical equipment sold to Cuba during the days of Yugoslavia, and the President wanted to support their sales efforts.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador told Loncar that the USG would be stunned that the president of a democratic country such as Croatia, with aspirations to join both the EU and NATO, would visit a country with such a poor record on human rights and democratization. The Ambassador followed up with Loncar on March 17, providing additional background material on the state of EU-Cuba relations, suggesting that the president might wish to examine whether any EU countries had visited Cuba at the head of state level in recent memory.

¶3. (C) In a March 21 meeting with the president's chief foreign policy advisor, Tomislav Jakic, the Ambassador repeated the above points and also provided a copy of the State Department Human Rights report for Cuba, along with information from non-governmental organizations describing the human rights situation in Cuba.

¶4. (C) Jakic then advised the Ambassador that the President had decided not to visit Cuba after all, at least in part because he did not want to be out of line with EU practice. The Ambassador responded that that was an excellent decision.

¶5. (C) MFA State Secretary Hidajet Biscevic told the Ambassador March 22 that he had told the new (non-resident) Cuban ambassador that Croatia would not consider any high-level exchanges until after the EU completes its bi-annual review of Cuba policy this summer. Biscevic also noted to us that the MFA had rejected the Cuban ambassador's request of a meeting with the Justice Minister to discuss Guantanamo.

FRANK